

# Offender Reentry

*For people with disabilities*

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## **Agency Involved:** *Department of Corrections*

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Each U.S. state has a Department of Corrections to handle its prison system. At the national level, The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) (part of the U.S. Department of Justice) runs the federal penitentiaries and correctional institutions across the country.

## **Summary**

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Many state corrections agencies across the US are interested in reentry programs (also called transition programs). However, programs vary widely from state to state. Most of these programs have three goals: maintain public safety, reduce taxpayer costs, and reduce the rate of further crimes by helping ex-offenders to successfully rebuild their lives in their local communities.

The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) is part of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. NIC provides federal, state, and local corrections agencies with advice, training, information, and help with program development. In 2002 NIC created a series of *Transition from Prison to Community* (TCP) demonstration projects in 8 states. In 2009, 6 additional states were added to the program.

Missouri's Department of Corrections was one of the original 8 TCP initiatives, called the Missouri Reentry Process. It is considered one of the best in the country.

In 2008, Congress passed the *Second Chance Act*, which provides grants for projects helping people leaving prisons or jails successfully reenter society. The Act also established the National Reentry Resource Center, a project of the Council of State Governments.

Both the *Transitions from Prison to Community* projects and the *Second Chance Act* projects are designed to help ex-offenders establish themselves as stable community members and reduce the risk they might commit future crimes. Current thinking in best practices recommends that reentry programs focus on several key factors:

- Employment assistance and job-skills training
- Substance abuse treatment (*80 percent have a history of substance abuse*)
- Housing assistance
- Family-based programming (*help families and communities support returning ex-offenders*)
- Individual and group mentoring
- Victim support (*especially if the offender and victim have a personal relationship*)

More details available at:

[Second Chance Act Fact Sheet](#)

[National Reentry Resource Center](#)

[Report of the Reentry Policy Council](#)

## ***Specific Benefits***

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Most reentry programs focus around an established **Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model** for reducing recidivism (the likelihood a person will commit another crime after getting out of prison/jail). Under this model, corrections staff give an assessment to each incoming offender. Although there are many different assessments in use, they generally focus around the three core concepts of this model:

- **Risk**
  - How likely is the person to commit future crimes?
  - High risk offenders get more benefit from interventions than do low risk offenders. Risk factors include age at first offense, type/seriousness of the offense, mental illness, history of substance abuse, etc.
- **Need**
  - What aspects of the person and his or her lifestyle are most contributing to increased risk?
  - These aspects are called "criminogenic needs". They include personality type, the person's thinking/rationalization about crime, attitudes about life, social relationships, non-criminal social activities, work history, education level, etc.
- **Responsivity**
  - What types of intervention and instruction will be most effective with the person?
  - This involves assessment of leaning style, motivation, cognitive strengths, etc. Cognitive behavioral therapy is usually part of the intervention.

Individuals with the highest risk factors usually get the most intensive intervention beginning soon after incarceration and focused on eventual reentry to the community.

The National Institute of Corrections has developed a standardized Transition Action Plan template which some state DOCs (including Missouri) are modifying and using, although different agencies call it by different names. Under this model, a case management team works with the individual to plan supports and interventions based on the RNR assessment results. As the person's release date approaches, the Transition Action Plan focuses on specific reentry needs:

- Identification (driver's license, social security card, other IDs)
- Benefits Eligibility
- Transportation
- Housing
- Medical/Mental Health/Dental
- Substance Abuse Counseling/Treatment
- Family (nature of the person's family, criminogenic risk factors, support needs, etc.)
- Education

- Employment
- Financial Obligations (court fines, child support, outstanding debt, etc.)

Based on these factors, the case management team will develop specific measurable goals to help the person as they transition to society.

Individuals who have served time in prison will likely have access to their RNR assessment and transition plan. If they do not, they should contact their facility or probation and parole officer about getting a copy. This information could prove very useful for other service providers.

### *Missouri Reentry Program Benefits*

(The Missouri Reentry Program calls its planning sheet a "Transition Accountability Plan" rather than "Transition Action Plan".)

The Missouri Reentry Program includes network of "Transitional Housing Units" associated with each of Missouri's medium and minimum security institutions. These are handled through local community service organizations under Community Reentry Contracts. Offenders can enter a Transitional Housing Unit (when appropriate & available) approximately six months prior to release.

In Missouri, Transitional Housing Units and similar community reentry contract groups offer services including

- Academic and vocational education
- Pre-release issuing of a state ID card, replacement birth certificate, and replacement Social Security Card
- Pre-release applications for Medicaid and coordination of resumption of any VA benefits
- Mental health, medical and substance abuse treatment, with continuity of care into the community through the Department of Mental Health
- Education on available faith-based supports
- Training on employability skills and life skills
- Employment services through the Division of Workforce Development
- Information regarding child support
- Education on strengthening family relationships and pro-social community participation
- Classes on the impact of crime on victims

More details available at:

[2011 Missouri Reentry Program Report](#)

[National Reentry Resource Center](#)

[History of Risk-Needs-Responsivity Assessment Model](#)

### ***Populations Served (eligibility)***

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Often the prosecuting attorney, judge, department of corrections, and police department collaborate on the initial decision of whether to administer an RNR assessment. Each state sets different standards about when an RNR assessment is appropriate.

Based on the results of the RNR, corrections staff determine who is eligible for significant reentry services and a Transition Action Plan soon after a person enters prison. In general, people with a higher risk of committing future crimes ("recidivism") get the most intensive interventions. Research has shown that intensive interventions for low risk individuals is not as effective and can sometimes increase recidivism. Many individuals with low risk, first time offenders do not get an RNR assessment at all.

## ***Disability***

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Having a disability does not affect eligibility for reentry services.

## ***Criminal Record – Drug Offenses***

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Although a history of substance abuse does not affect eligibility for reentry services, people with a felony conviction involving illegal drugs may be blocked from receiving some of the external social services related to reentry.

- Driver's license – in many states, a person's driver's license is automatically suspended for at least six months after any kind of drug conviction
  - In Missouri, the suspension is 90 days for the first offense and one year for a second offense
- Student financial aid – Until 2006, students convicted of drug-related offenses were ineligible for any federal loans, grants, and work-study related to higher education. Now students convicted of drug-related offenses while in college and getting financial aid are blocked for ever getting any further aid. This only applies to drug offenses.
- Anyone convicted of a drug-related felony after 1996 is blocked by federal law from getting food stamps or TANF assistance, although some states have modified or eliminated these bans (See entries on TANF and Food Stamps).

More details available at:

[Missouri's Abuse and Lose law](#)  
[Aid Elimination section, Higher Education Act](#)

## ***Substance Abuse***

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Substance abuse does not disqualify a person for reentry services. Research shows that 80% of offenders may have a history of substance abuse. Treatment for substance abuse is specifically mentioned as an important element of the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model.

## ***Insider Tips/Comments***

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If an ex-offender remembers completing a battery of self-assessments and formalized tests, he or she probably had an RNR assessment and may have had a transition plan. If they do not have a copy of this paperwork, they might contact their state Department of Corrections, their reentry coordinator, or their Probation and Parole Officer about getting copies.

These records could speed up application and eligibility for other community services and be a help in planning support needs.

## **Contact Information**

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### National:

- [Wikipedia List of all U.S. state departments of correction](#)
- [National Institute of Corrections](#)

### State:

- [Missouri Department of Corrections](#)
  - 573-751-2389
- [Missouri Reentry Process](#)

### Local:

- [St. Louis Alliance for Reentry](#)
- [Second Chance Kansas City](#) (a project of the Kansas City Metropolitan Crime Commission)

## **Web links for Independent research:**

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List links for further investigation

- [National Institute of Corrections](#)
  - [Transition from Prison to the Community Project](#)
  - [Transition from Jail to the Community Project](#) (with the Urban League)
- [Prisoner Reentry Institute](#), John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City College of NY
- [National Reentry Resource Center](#), Council of State Governments
  - [Reentry "Myth Buster" fact sheets](#)
- [Federal Interagency Reentry Council](#)
- [History of Risk-Needs-Responsivity Assessment Model](#), from Public Safety Canada
- Missouri
  - [Area Resources for Community and Human Services \(ARCHS\)](#), host site for the annual Missouri Reentry Conference held each November at Lake of the Ozarks
  - [NIC Summary of Missouri's TCP Project](#)
  - [Missouri Reentry Process](#)

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This publication was funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health contract #AOC13380075. Accuracy of the information contained in the document is the sole responsibility of the authors.

This publication was produced under the auspices of the Region 7 TACE Center at the University of Missouri, which is funded by a grant from the Department of Education. The contents do not necessarily represent the policies of the Department of Education, and users should not assume endorsement of the contents by the Federal Government.